



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UPDATE: OPERATION ICE PALACE
FORMER SIMS GENERAL STORE OWNER, TWO MORE
CONVICTED IN METH CONSPIRACY

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that three co-defendants, including the former owner of Sims General Store in Sims, Mo., have been convicted by a federal jury for their role in a methamphetamine conspiracy. The trial convictions are the first in several cases stemming from Operation Ice Palace, a long-term investigation into the illegal sale of large quantities of over-the-counter cold medications to methamphetamine manufacturers in southwest Missouri. Operation Ice Palace has resulted in a series of indictments by a federal grand jury against 53 defendants.

Sherry Woodard, 44, of Washburn, Mo., her brother **Lonnie Weston**, 58, of McDonald County, Mo., and **Frances Duckett**, 37, of Pineville, Mo., were each found guilty of participating in a conspiracy to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine in McDonald County, Mo., at the conclusion of a trial that began June 14, 2004. **Woodard**, the owner of Sims General Store during the time of the conspiracy, was also found guilty of distributing pseudoephedrine. **Weston** was also found guilty of possession with intent to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine.

Following the presentation of evidence in their trial, Graves said, the jury in U.S. District Court in Springfield deliberated about five hours before returning the guilty verdicts to U.S. District Judge Ortrie D. Smith on June 17, 2004.

This week's trial marked the first convictions in Operation Ice Palace, which targeted businesses that provided meth cooks with pseudoephedrine, a primary ingredient in the manufacture of methamphetamine. Under federal law, it is illegal to possess or distribute pseudoephedrine knowing (or having reasonable cause to believe) it will be used to manufacture methamphetamine. Such over-the-counter cold medications as Actifed and Swan contain

pseudoephedrine.

“Business owners who violate the law, as well as the meth cooks and the drug dealers they supply, are being held accountable for their actions,” Graves said. “We are aggressively prosecuting all the links in the chain. Disrupting that illegal supply line is an effective strategy for combating meth by stopping it at the source.”

Woodard purchased \$2,246 worth of pseudoephedrine-based products from a wholesale supplier in 2001, Graves said, which accounted for 46.5 percent of her store’s inventory purchases. “Industry averages for pseudoephedrine sales at convenience stores are less than one percent of total sales,” Graves said. “Obviously, the Sims General Store far exceeded that amount – in a county with a population of less than 22,000.”

During the first half of 2002, Graves added, the Sims store surpassed that percentage of pseudoephedrine sales. From January to July 2002, about 50.5 percent of the stores’ inventory purchases were of pseudoephedrine-based products. Graves also noted that during the six-month period from August 2001 to January 2002, **Woodard** purchased nearly 42,000 Swan 60-milligram pseudoephedrine pills, enough to manufacture 2.5 kilograms of methamphetamine.

“This defendant wasn’t a typical drug dealer, but she profited financially from the meth trade,” Graves said. “She helped fuel the spread of meth in southwest Missouri by illegally providing ingredients to the meth cooks.”

Using ingredients obtained from **Woodard’s** store, Grave said, **Weston** manufactured methamphetamine and sold it to others to distribute.

Woodward, Weston and **Duckett** are among 10 co-defendants who were indicted on Oct. 16, 2003. Six co-defendants pleaded guilty to their roles in the conspiracy, and charges against one co-defendant were dismissed in lieu of state prosecution.

* **Billy Richard Brassfield**, 55, of Pineville, Mo., and **Jody Weston**, 23, of Washburn, Mo., pleaded guilty on May 20, 2004, to participating in a methamphetamine conspiracy that resulted in the manufacture and distribution of between 1.5 and 5 kilograms of methamphetamine. Both co-defendants admitted that they conspired to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine between January 1999 and March 14, 2002, in McDonald County, Mo. Specifically, **Brassfield** assisted co-defendants in obtaining precursors, such as pseudoephedrine, for the manufacture of methamphetamine, Graves said. **Weston** did the same. During the conspiracy, **Brassfield** owned and operated Sims General Store from as early as 1999 to October 2000 (when he sold the store to **Woodard**), and would divert pseudoephedrine that he obtained for the store to a co-defendant in the case for the purpose of manufacturing methamphetamine, Graves said. **Brassfield** also allowed methamphetamine to be manufactured on his property. **Weston** admitted that he assisted in cooking methamphetamine and acted, at times, as a lookout during the manufacturing process. He also admitted that he distributed methamphetamine to others.

* **Kevin Davis**, 43, of Exeter, Mo., pleaded guilty on May 19, 2004, to conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. By pleading guilty, **Davis** admitted that he was present during 10 to 15 methamphetamine cooks and would act as a lookout during the manufacturing process. **Davis** was originally arrested on March 21, 2001, driving a stolen vehicle in McDonald County. Upon searching the vehicle, law enforcement officers discovered components of a methamphetamine laboratory, including lithium batteries, coffee filters, empty bottles of pseudoephedrine and anhydrous ammonia.

* **Craig Guinn**, 41, of Westville, Okla., pleaded guilty on May 19, 2004, to conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. By pleading guilty, **Guinn** admitted that he assisted in gathering precursors for the manufacture of methamphetamine. Specifically, he admitted that he participated in the theft of a 1,000-gallon anhydrous tank in Granby, Mo.

* **Michelle Kreitel**, 32, of Seligman, Mo., pleaded guilty on May 19, 2004, to conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. By pleading guilty, **Kreitel** admitted that she purchased methamphetamine and assisted in the manufacture of methamphetamine between January 1999 and March 14, 2002.

* **Rebecca Singleton**, 36, of Ginger Blue, Mo., pleaded guilty on May 25, 2004, to conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Under federal statutes, each of the defendants could be subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison without parole, up to life imprisonment, plus a fine up to \$4 million for the conspiracy conviction. In addition, **Woodard** could be subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. **Weston** could also be subject to an additional mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison without parole, up to life imprisonment, plus a fine up to \$4 million. Their sentences will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. It was investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Southwest Missouri Drug Task Force, and the McDonald County Sheriff's Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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